

A Night With Galsworthy in Chicago

By BARRETT H. CLARK.

THE American tour of Arnold Bennett some six years ago was conducted upon the latest advertising principles. Mr. Bennett seemed to have more to say about himself than any one else, and like many another traveller from his land he was profuse in his comments on our own, mingling with them not a little that was far from complimentary. Judging from his articles that appeared soon after his arrival in *Your United States* he must have begun writing his impressions before he stood well clear of the customs' officers.

Not long after Mr. Bennett's arrival there was a small news item in the New York papers, tucked away on the eighth page, stating that Mr. and Mrs. John Galsworthy had come to New York to be present at the opening of Galsworthy's new play *The Pigeon*. There were no interviews, no receptions, no lectures—no one seemed aware that the author of *Fraternity* was in this country.

"But No Speech!"

It so happened that I saw the item on the eighth page and I wrote Mr. Galsworthy reminding him of a promise he had made that if he ever came to America he would do his best to come to Chicago. I asked him whether he would care to be the guest of the Dramatic Club of the University. He replied at once:

"I think it is not impossible that my wife and I may be in Chicago next week. I could come with great pleasure to your Dramatic Club on the express understanding that I made no speech, but just chatted and answered questions to the best of my ability." In answer to my letter assuring him that he would not be called upon to speak, he wrote: "I look forward to the occasion now that I know I have not to make a speech." The next letter contained a warning not to let the Chicago papers know that he was coming, for by this time certain more enlightened editors had found out that Galsworthy was something of a celebrity.

Short and Shy.

I went to the Congress Hotel on the morning of the arrival of the Galsworthys. Making my way through the crowded lobby I peered about, looking for the tall and rather youthful man I had pictured Mr. Galsworthy to be, but as I went to the desk to telephone to his room I felt a pluck at my sleeve and turning about I recognized my guest. Of course he was unlike his pictures. To begin with, he was short and some years older than I had imagined him. He was slight and wiry in build, and his expression indicative of great power and keen intelligence. He was nearly bald, but the hair about his temples was gray. His face was finely modelled (the well shaped head is clearly observable in all the pictures). The mouth was rather small and the light blue eyes exceptionally so. He used a monocle, gold rimmed spectacles and a pince nez.

My own embarrassment was equalled only by his. The sober dignity and reticence of the writer is characteristic of the man's manner. With every apparent desire on his part to be communicative, he merely uttered a few commonplaces, to



which I politely murmured "Yes" or "No, indeed." He soon put a stop to this gentle sparring, excused himself, and returned a moment later with Mrs. Galsworthy.

Mrs. Galsworthy.

The spirit of our small party underwent an immediate and marked change. I could see that she was the spokesman of the family. With her at his elbow he was at his ease.

The dinner was an informal affair and the only other guest of prominence was Robert Herrick, who, we thought, would put the Galsworthys a little more at their ease. But as Mr. Herrick is not unlike Mr. Galsworthy and the reticence of each appeared to react on the other, the dinner seemed doomed. It was then that the tact and charm of Mrs. Galsworthy were brought into play. Some one asked Mr. Galsworthy a question; he laid down his fork and endeavored to answer it, but his wife took up the conversation and the affair was launched. Herrick became almost effusive, the members of the club risked asking questions and before long Mr. Galsworthy was almost making a speech. Whenever he was at a loss his wife helped him out.

The Idea of "Strife."

The conversation turned to *Strife*. How did the idea first take root in the dramatist's mind? "One day," he answered, "I saw two men at the club. They were arguing and arguing about something and their wrangles never seemed to lead anywhere. I took the idea of capital and labor as a more dramatic theme and made my characters behave in much the same way." This was his statement. His wife elaborated it.

Some one then asked him whether the scene at the end of the second act of *The Silver Box* was intentionally symbolic. At the same time Mrs. Galsworthy was telling about the militant suffragette riots in London, and the wholesale window smashing. Her husband, taking that incident as a cue, remarked: "You will remember that at the end of the act in question Mrs. Barthwick hears the Jones children sobbing outside her open window. She asks the butler to close the window as she does not want to hear the children. The butler does so, but she still hears their voices. It is my purpose, I fancy, not to smash windows, but to open them!"

Mr. Herrick asked our guest about the report, often heard, that *Justice* effected a radical change in English prison conditions. The dramatist modestly replied that he felt sure such was not the case. It is true, he said, that Winston Churchill was affected by a performance of the play and that certain reforms were made, but these would have been made, and all that the play did was possibly to have reminded him of the condition of affairs. He had not written it for that purpose. Here Mrs. Galsworthy put in a word and

said that "Jack" had spent many months visiting prisons throughout England.

A professor of English, one of the guests of honor, told Mr. Galsworthy that he had recommended to his students some three or four Galsworthy books, and that the students were struck by their pessimism. The Englishman replied:

"Things As They Are."

"When people say I am pessimistic, I hardly know what to answer. I can't see why they should consider my looking at things as they are a form of pessimism. If my works have any moral value at all, it is that they teach tolerance, sympathy for the viewpoint of other people, that they try to do away with 'stiffness,' useless conventions, the abuse of authority. I am rather distressed to hear that my readers think me pessimistic."

The conversation so far had centred round the plays. Some one asked him whether he preferred novel writing, and he said: "If I had to give up play writing or novel writing, I should give up play writing. It may be because the novel was my first love, but I rather imagine

that it is because I like the leisurely methods of novel writing; I take pleasure in weaving the web of a character. The effect of a novel is more lasting than that of the play. A play like *Justice* may perhaps strike home at once, and possibly cause a material reform, but a novel is more effective in the long run. It is natural to me when I write plays to adopt what I have termed an 'austere technique'; I reduce the whole to its essentials. The game is interesting, but I prefer the novel."

"The Pigeon."

Before bidding the Galsworthys good-by I asked Mr. Galsworthy—Mrs. Galsworthy was not present—about the symbolic content of *The Pigeon*. Without his wife he was at a loss to explain it to me, and asked me to write him. Here is the answer:

"About those dates in *The Pigeon*. Christmas Eve because of Ferrand's remark: 'He is come, Monsieur!' and the general tenor of Wellwyn's acceptance of every kind of outcast. New Year's Day because of Ferrand's remark: 'Appy New Year!' which marks the disappearance of casual charity in favor of institutionalism, of the era of outcasts in favor of the era of reformers. April 1 because of the joke at the end on the Humblemen, which symbolizes the fact, or rather the essence of the play, that, while Wellwyn (representing sympathy and understanding) is being 'plucked' all through the play, he comes out and knows he does, on top at the end, as the only possible helper of the unhelpable. I hope this is sufficiently obscured!! . . . I wish we were coming back to Chicago, but no such luck. We are due to sail on May 11. Best greetings from us both."

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